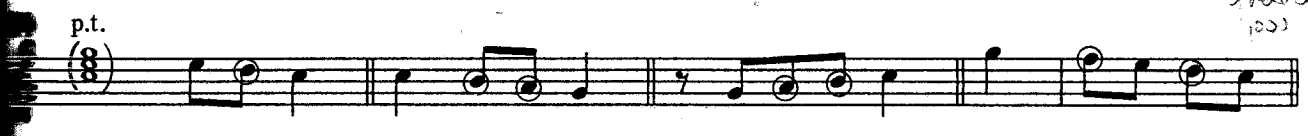
Nonharmonic (Nonchord) Tones

The investigation of the incidence and usage of nonharmonic tones is crucial to the understanding of Bach's music.[7] Their frequency of use, and the conditions of introduction, length, metric placement, and resolution, as well as whether they are diatonic or chromatic, all contribute toward a definition of this style. Bach's usage can be summarized as follows. (In this summary, dissonant and consonant nonharmonic tones are considered together.)

1. *Passing tones* (p.t.) are freely used. They fill in leaps of thirds and fourths between chord tones, by step. In this style, passing tones tend to be short, diatonic, and more often unaccented than accented (though the accented descending passing tone occurs often). They may freely ascend or descend. Two successive passing tones in a scalar figure form a common idiom.
2. *Neighbor (Auxiliary) tones* (n.t.) are also quite common, the lower neighbor more so. Like passing tones, these are normally short, unaccented, and diatonic (though the chromatic lower neighbor is possible).
3. *Anticipations* (ant.) are typical only at cadences.
4. *Suspensions* (susp.) are widely used and are a principal expressive device. They will be treated in detail in Chapter 2.
5. *Appoggiaturas* (app.) are quite rare in this style, being more characteristic of later music. They are almost always diatonic and rarely last for more than one beat. The unaccented appoggiatura (called by some theorists a cambiata) is referred to here as an incomplete neighbor tone (i.n.t.).
6. *Escape tones* (e.t.) are fairly rare in this music. They are typically very short and are always diatonic.
7. *Pedal point* is a special device which will be taken up later. It will suffice for now to point out that pedal effects are largely restricted to the dominant and tonic notes, whether in a bass line or as part of a compound line. Pedal point is debatably nonharmonic, as it is typically the upper voices rather than the pedal that are heard as nonharmonic. In any case, the pedal note always begins and ends as a consonance.

Ex. 1-38

Some nonharmonic tones in the Bach style



7. Classes needing to review the definitions of nonharmonic tones and any other aspects of harmony at this stage of study, are again referred to the review materials on pp. 327ff.